

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today thanked President Obama for amending the August 31, 2011 Major Disaster Declaration for the State of New York to include Sullivan and Orange Counties. The designation will allow homeowners and small businesses to apply for Individual Assistance to help address damage to property that occurred as a result of Hurricane Irene. Hinchey is now asking that the declaration be again amended to include Public Assistance for Sullivan and Orange Counties so that federal assistance can be provided to repair damaged infrastructure.

"The damage to public infrastructure throughout these counties is substantial," said Hinchey. "We need an expanded disaster declaration in order to receive federal support. Representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, along with state and local officials, are already on the ground assessing the situation. I am confident that they will eventually approve Public Assistance for these two counties, but I am hopeful that the president will grant the necessary disaster designation immediately so that we can expedite the process and get things in Sullivan and Orange back to normal. "

Following the hurricane, Hinchey has worked to ensure that counties in the Congressional District he represents have the disaster declarations necessary to receive federal assistance. Earlier this week, Hinchey led 19 of his House colleagues in requesting an expanded disaster declaration from President Obama. Prior to that, he sought an emergency disaster declaration for Dutchess County and brought the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to Ulster County to tour flooded areas.

Hinchey says the next phase in the process will be helping New Yorkers navigate the disaster recovery process. "My offices have been working tirelessly to help individuals and businesses throughout the region get the help they need," he said. "Anyone who is having trouble with this process should contact one of my offices today. I'm going to do everything I can to help."

The full text of Hinchey's letter to President Obama follows:

September 2, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

I was pleased to see that today the Major Disaster Declaration for the State of New York, issued on August 31, 2011, was amended to include Individual Assistance for Orange and Sullivan Counties. This was absolutely necessary given how badly these counties were affected by Hurricane Irene.

In addition to providing assistance to individuals, I also hope you will consider again amending the Declaration to include Public Assistance for these counties. The neighboring counties of Rockland, Westchester and Ulster have already been designated for Public Assistance. Considering the severity of damage to roads, bridges, and public buildings and utilities, local governments in Orange and Sullivan Counties will not be able to bear the burden of repairing and rebuilding without federal aid.

I have personally seen the extent of the damage in these counties, and it is clear that public infrastructure has been devastated. The Mayor of Middletown initially estimated damage to be over \$1 million to city infrastructure. The Orange County Executive has already urged FEMA and Governor Andrew Cuomo to make Orange County eligible for Public Assistance. In Sullivan County, the County Manager estimates at least \$1 million in infrastructure damage as well. I understand that damage assessments are ongoing; however, given the substantial damage to public assets, I ask that you expedite these counties' requests.

I am grateful on behalf of the homeowners and small businesses in Orange and Sullivan Counties for the assistance that FEMA will be extending to them in the coming weeks. However, I implore you to extend assistance to our local governments as well.

Thank you for your consideration and ongoing efforts.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey